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ABSTRACT

This paper contains a partial report on an empirical study to assess the utility of Gross' theory of role conflict resolution in predicting role choice by administrators who become involved in formal collective negotiations for the first time. Some relationships between role choice and selected situational variables are also examined. The study findings conclude that (1) the Gross theory provides a useful framework for examining internal and external environmental factors, (2) the administrator role in negotiations will increasingly identify with board expectations as older and more experienced incumbents retire or seek other responsibilities, and (3) role ambivalence characterizes study subjects. In essence, role performance is consistent with an emerging "managerial" concept of school administration, but role preference is identified with the more traditionally oriented "instructional leader" image of the administrator. (Figure 1 on page 18 may reproduce poorly because of marginal legibility.) (Author/JF)

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ROLE CHOICE OF CHIEF SCHOOL OFFICERS IN COLLECTIVE
NEGOTIATIONS: ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION

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Introduction

The prototype of the conflict resolution model employed in that portion of the study reported in this paper, was developed and empirically tested by Neal Gross and his associates in the mid-1950's.¹ Gross's formulation represented a successful attempt to predict behavior selected by incumbents of a focal position in a formal organization when confronted with two incompatible expectations for performance in that position. The population for this original study consisted of 107 school superintendents in the state of Massachusetts. During the following decade the formulation was tested in similar role conflict situations confronting law enforcement officers, middle-management personnel in industry and district government officials in a developing African nation.² With minor reservations each of these studies supported the utility of Gross's Theory of Role Conflict Resolution.

The theory posited four mutually exclusive modes of behavior which could be selected as a result of exposure to conflicting expectations for role performance: (1) conformity to one, or (2) the other, of either expectation, (3) partial conformity to each expectation (compromise), or (4) conformity to neither expectation (avoidance). The similarity between these behaviors and the four alternatives essentially available

to a chief school officer in board-staff negotiations provided the incentive for testing the theory within the framework of the negotiations process. These alternatives consist of:

(1) negotiator for the board, (2) spokesman for the teachers, (3) agent of mediation for both groups, and (4) resource consultant for the board and the staff.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the present study was to assess the capacity of the theory to predict role choices by these position incumbents (chief school officers) in the context of unprecedented social and organizational change, precipitated by the advent of formal collective negotiations.

An additional purpose of this paper is to identify relationships between selected administrator and school-district characteristics and administrative role-taking in the negotiations setting.

VERIFICATION OF THE GROSS THEORY

As previously indicated, the theoretical formulation advanced by Gross holds that when the occupant of a focal position in a social organization is confronted with two incompatible expectations for his performance in that position, he will choose either: (1) to conform to the expectation held by one of the two reference groups, (2) to conform to the expectation of the other group, (3) to conform in part to the expectation of each, by some form of compromise, or (4)

to avoid conforming to the expectation of either, and in effect, withdraw from the conflict. These behaviors were postulated on the interaction of the position occupant's personal system of values (moral orientation) with the extent to which each audience expectation is perceived as legitimate, and the negative sanctions potential attributed to each group, should he not conform to the perceived expectation.

Moral orientation was determined by a measurement of "disposition toward mandatory behavior." This Superintendent Performances Instrument contained thirty-seven items which covered the range of behaviors normally expected of chief school officers. Each item was accompanied by a five-point scale ranging from "absolutely must" to "absolutely must not"--fulfill the prescribed behavior. Only extreme responses were scored, and the resultant distribution was then trichtomized into moralist, moral-expedient, and expedient value categories. Perceptions of legitimacy and anticipated negative sanctions were elicited in dichotomous terms, employing the categories legitimate and illegitimate, and strong and weak.

Outcome behaviors were identified in terms of the four alternatives mentioned, for combinations of each of the three value orientations with sixteen possible combinations of legitimacy and negative sanctions. Thus, a total of forty-eight interactions were specified, together with the behavioral

alternative indicated for each. You may refer to Figure 1 on the reference sheets provided for a visual impression of these interactions.

The logic of the theory suggested that if a position occupant were confronted with conflicting expectations A and B, only one of which was viewed as legitimate, his behavior would conform to the legitimate expectation. If, however, the legitimate expectation were accompanied by weak negative sanctions for non-conformity, and the illegitimate one by strong negative sanctions, such a situation would appear as a logical dilemma. In a case such as this, the normal assumption that behavior would conform to the legitimate expectation is effectively negated by the presence of severe penalties for taking this course of action. Now, what can we predict?

Gross's answer to this question incorporates the function of value orientation as the third categorical variable. Figure 2 on the reference sheet portrays the effect of this variable. Utilizing the premise that an expedient would base his action primarily on the negative sanctions attending his conflict, and that a moralist would be more attuned to the legitimacy dimension of his problem, and further, that a moral-expedient would take both factors into somewhat equal account; the theory would, in this particular instance, predict: (1) behavior conforming to the legitimate expectation should the position occupant be a moralist, (2) behavior conforming to the expectation attributed to that group from

whom strong negative sanctions are anticipated, in the case of the expedient, and (3) behavior exhibiting partial conformity to both groups' expectations (compromise) when a moral-expedient is the decision maker. At this point it should also be noted that the fourth alternative, avoidance behavior, (non-compliance with either expectation) occurs only when both expectations are perceived as illegitimate.

On the assumption that chief school officer roles consisting of: board negotiator, teacher spokesman, board-staff mediator and consultant-at-large to both parties in the negotiations process, could be substantially equated to the four role alternatives of the Gross formulation, perceptions of role expectations together with responses to the value orientation instrument were elicited from a population of chief school administrators in Western New York State. These data were utilized as a means of testing the generalizability of Gross's theory of role conflict resolution.

Procedures

Data was obtained from eighty-eight chief school officers (85% response) in the eight-county region of Western New York, during the second academic year (1968-1969) following the enactment of the State's Taylor Law. Respondents represented a wide range of school organizations, ranging from small, rural districts with enrollments of three- to four-hundred, to large suburban districts in excess of 10,000 pupils.

On the assumption that in the course of negotiations, teachers and board members might normally expect the support of the chief school officer, each administrator was asked to record his perception of the expectations each of these groups held for his role in the process in terms of: (1) their legitimacy or illegitimacy, and (2) the likelihood of each to respond with strong or weak negative sanctions, should he not conform to their expectations. In addition, each respondent completed the value orientation instrument. And finally, from among four descriptions of negotiations role alternatives provided, (see reference sheet 2) each respondent was asked to indicate the one which most closely approximated his current function in negotiations.

Results

The alternative reported as the actual role in negotiations agreed with the alternative predicted by the interaction of value orientation with perceptions of legitimacy and negative sanctions in 62.5% of the cases. To determine the statistical significance of this result, the index of .625 was compared with a proportionate chance expectancy of .43 by the use of Chi Square test for independence. The resultant value of 4.284 was significant at less than the .05 level of error probability.

It was concluded that the theory in question provides a valid means of predicting performance in role conflict situations facing chief school officers in the emergence of

collective negotiations.

Use of the Theory

Since the formal adoption of negotiations procedures in school systems can be expected to gain momentum for some time to come, it would seem that chief school officers in localities not as yet directly affected by legal mandates for bargaining with teachers, will eventually face decisions involving their functions in the relationships that emerge. Even though some precedent has been established by virtue of more recent experiences in schools, the selection of role performance for chief school officers remains a matter of individual interpretation. In an immediate, "practical" sense, reliance on the predictive capacity of the theory will probably not affect the negotiation strategy of school boards or teacher groups, in the sense that they might make decisions based on advance knowledge of the role their chief school officer will assume in negotiations. It is also conceded that for chief school officers, awareness of the concepts and interactions involved in the theory will not automatically improve their capacity to deal more effectively with an ambivalent or conflict-ridden situation. It is contended, however, that application of the systematic behavioral concepts encompassed in the theory can be of considerable assistance to the practicing chief school officer.

Applications which are implied for instruction are closely related to the benefits contended for practice. Insight to

the theoretical dimensions of decision-making models is widely regarded as an integral component of graduate programs in educational administration. Since students in these programs can expect, as practicing administrators, to be confronted with incompatible or conflicting expectations from a variety of audiences, the conflict resolution model could serve as one approach to a more conscious examination of the dynamics involved in making decisions about role performance. For instructional purposes, a variety of role conflict situations, ordinarily encountered by virtue of the chief school officer position, could be introduced to students to provide a more realistic frame of reference. The inductive orientation of such an approach could conceivably enhance the student's capacity for understanding his own value system, and provide him with greater motivation for the identification and application of concepts developed in behavioral theory related to role performance.

ROLE CHOICE AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS

As a preliminary to the analysis of some situational factors related to role choice in collective negotiations, it would seem helpful to indicate the status of role choice, before and after the enactment of the Taylor Law, as reported by the chief school officers who participated in the study.

In actuality, the magnitude of reported role change was rather limited. Almost two-thirds of the eighty-eight respondents

reported "no change" in role definition following implementation of the Taylor Law. Of the slightly more than one-third who indicated a change in role, about half of these adopted the board negotiator function, just under half subscribed to the mediator role, and the small remainder (about three cases) chose the resource consultant role. In toto, negotiating for the board increased from forty-three to fifty-three percent, the mediational function decreased from forty-three to thirty-one percent, while a negligible change from fifteen to seventeen percent occurred in the consultant role. Interestingly enough, only one chief administrator reported serving as spokesman for the teachers prior to passage of the Taylor Law, and this figure reduced to zero following its passage.

Role Choice, Age and Experience

An examination of the relationships of administrator age and experience with role choice clearly showed that the younger and less experienced the administrator, the more likely he would serve the interests of the school board in negotiations. Among three age groups denoted for these comparisons (44 and under, 45-54, and 55 and over) those in the 44 and under category either remained in, or changed to the board's position in negotiations twice as many times as those in the middle or older age groupings. Perhaps even more noteworthy is the fact that within their own age category, the younger chief school officers chose this function at a rate of 7-1 over the other two roles combined. Conversely, those in the middle age-range

reported performance in the mediational and consultant roles at about twice the rate of choice for the negotiator role. Chief school officers in the 55-plus category reflected the greatest preference for the consultant role, both within their own number, and when compared to the other two younger groups' preferences.

Comparisons based on length of experience disclosed similar results. Of those in the least-experienced group (10 years or less as a chief school officer), performance in the negotiator role was reported twice as often as the mediational role, and more than six times as frequently as the consultative function. In the 11-20 (years of administrative experience) group, performance as negotiator for the board occurred about twice as often as the other roles. With the most experienced group (21 years and over) reported performance in negotiation and mediation roles was about equal, and both of these roles were reported at somewhat less than twice the frequency of the consultant role. Again, the data suggests an inverse relationship between length of experience in the position of chief school officer and adoption of a more active role in negotiations.

Role Choice and Size of District

Comparisons of role choice with school district size led to the following observations: (1) Chief school officers in medium-sized school districts of the region (enrollment 1,000-2,500) reported functioning as the board's agent in

negotiations eight times as much as their counterparts in the small districts, and large-school administrators reported this role to a lesser degree than that reported for the mediational, middle-man role. In all three groupings by district size, the consultant role was being practiced in the smallest proportion.

The dominance of the negotiator role in the medium-size districts may be partially explained by a comparison of factors indigenous to the organizational structure of schools comprising each of the groups. Small school systems, by virtue of the social interaction they afford among occupants of varying status positions, tend to homogenize group values. As a consequence, a chief school officer in this situation may be more reluctant to alienate himself from his professional "friends" than a chief school officer in the middle-sized school who functions in a system sufficiently larger that he can enjoy a degree of "separateness," but still small enough to rely on his expertise for the confident execution of the role of negotiator. In large districts, on the other hand, increased facility for task differentiation, afforded by greater numbers and more diversity in administrative staff, permits greater freedom in the delegation of the negotiator role to a staff specialist thus enabling the chief school officer (who is usually somewhat older and more experienced than his peers in the smaller districts) to retain his more traditionally oriented role as the middle-man in board-staff relations..

The final comparisons to be treated in this paper should produce some insight to the psychological quality of role performance by chief school officers. If an administrator is performing a function in board-staff negotiations which is at variance with his own preference, it would seem that some degree of discontent is being experienced. By recording the role performances of the subjects, as well as their perceptions of board and staff preferences for role performance by the chief school officer, we can generate some idea of the satisfaction which accompanies role performance.

In order to determine the extent to which these position incumbents may be influenced by the role expectations of their two primary organizational reference groups, the board and the teaching staff, each subject was asked to indicate the role which he perceived to be held as "most appropriate" by his board and his teachers, as well as the one which he personally regarded as such.

Comparisons of these data with the reported role in each case, indicated that regardless of the actual role being implemented by the chief school officer, this function coincided with perceived board expectations in 78% of the cases, with incumbent expectations, 69%, and with teachers' expectations in 60% of the cases. These figures tend to support the existence of a rather substantial orientation to board expectations on the part of the subjects of the study.

In contrast to this observation, however, a comparison

of chief school officer role preference with perceived role expectations attributed to board and staff seems to suggest that chief school officers role preferences tend to coincide more with staff expectations than with those of the board.

Table 1 on the supplemental reference sheet reflects a noticeably high degree of correspondence between role preferences held by the subjects and the frequency with which role expectations were attributed to teachers. In the first column these figures are 28 and 33; in the second, 36 and 35, and in the fourth, 19 and 20. In each of these pairs of numbers the agreement noticeably exceeds that which exists between board and chief school officer preferences. These observations suggest that while in practice, the subjects of the study are more inclined to adopt a role configuration that conforms to the perceived expectations of their boards, the figures just cited provide evidence that these chief administrators have retained much of their previous socialization as members of the instructional staff in the school organization.

Data reflecting changes in patterns of role allocation indicate a definite shift in the direction of board representation in negotiations, and a corresponding loss in the function of mediation. Even though there were some individual changes in and out of the consultant function, the proportion performing it remained substantially the same before and after collective negotiations was introduced.

A final conclusion suggested by the data is that the

chief school administrators who participated in the study have retained an identifiable commitment to traditional collegial expectations for their function as an instructional leader in contradistinction to the pattern of board-oriented role allocation reflected in the study. This would suggest that for these school executives, a perceptible amount of role ambivalence still persists.

Hypotheses

Assuming that the intensity of role conflict experienced in a given position is inversely related to satisfaction with performance in that position, some observations can be made about the pattern of role performances reflected in this paper.

Should the configuration of role choice identified within this somewhat limited population of chief school officers be found with other groups of these officials, then one might hypothesize that over time, the role of board negotiator will increase and the middle-man and consultant roles will diminish. Further, because the data disclosed that older, more experienced individuals accounted for a greater proportion of those chief school officers performing a consultant role, it seems reasonable to suggest that this function will cease existence first, with the mediational role following suit at a later time.

Since there still appears to be a strong sense of empathy with teacher expectations in the role preference of chief school officers, and since the data also show that their

performance corresponds more to perceptions of board expectations than teacher expectations--or their own expectations, for that matter--this would suggest a greater persistence of role conflict for those in the board negotiator role, following the institution of collective negotiations procedures. If such is the case, then it might be expected that chief school officers who are functioning as negotiator for their boards will evidence greater effort in the future to modify their role definition than those who have adopted other functions in this relationship.

The data that support this observation also suggest a relationship between the extent to which chief school officers have internalized the role of teacher during the pre-administrative phase of their careers, and the role definition they adopt in formal negotiations; with those whose values they shared at an earlier time. The rationale associated with these observations might indicate the hypothesis that administrative assumption of direct responsibility to the board for the conduct of collective negotiations with teachers is inversely related to the length of time that the chief school officer has functioned as a teacher.

Performance in the mediational and consultant roles may also have some potential for dissatisfaction on the part of chief school officers. Kahn³ suggests that role behavior designed to reduce interaction with one's role-senders (consultant function) may provide temporary respite to role conflict for a position incumbent. He maintains, however,

that this form of action may not only leave the initial conflict unresolved, but may lead to intensification of conflict in the future. On a longitudinal basis, it would be interesting to test the hypothesis suggested by Kahn's tentative conclusions, that the intensity of role conflict experienced by chief school officers who have disengaged themselves from active participation in, and responsibility for collective negotiations with teachers is greater than that experienced by those who have assumed the role of board representative or the role of board-staff mediator.

On the other hand, Etzioni⁴ has raised the possibility that the consultant role may be more conducive to amicable relationships between the chief school officer and his board and teachers. According to Etzioni, "The more personal contact the arbitrator of a dispute has had with the conflicting parties, the more disruptive the settlement of that dispute is likely to be for his relationship with one or both of the opposing sides."⁵ On the basis of this statement, an implication for dissatisfaction with either the negotiator or mediator roles is also recognized.

Since the matter of role performance by chief school officers in collective negotiations has not as yet been the subject of extensive empirical examination, perhaps some of the questions raised in this paper might serve to generate further empirical research in this area.

REFERENCES

¹For a detailed discussion of the theory in question, see Neal Gross, Ward S. Mason and Alexander W. McEachern, "A Theory of Role Conflict Resolution," Chapter 17, in Explorations in Role Analysis: Studies of the School Superintendency Role, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), pp. 281-318.

²Howard J. Ehrlich, "The Analysis of Role Conflict in a Complex Organization: The Police," (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1959); Delbert C. Miller and Fremont A. Shull, "The Prediction of Administrative Role Conflict Resolutions," Administrative Science Quarterly, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, Vol. 7, 1962, pp. 143-160; Alvin Magid, "Dimensions of Administrative Role and Conflict Resolution among Local Officials in Northern Nigeria," Administrative Science Quarterly, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, Vol. 12, No. 2, September, 1967, pp. 321-338.

³Robert L. Kahn, David M. Wolfe, Richard P. Quinn, John D. Snoek and Robert A. Rosenthal, Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and Ambiguity, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), pp. 382-383.

⁴Amitai Etzioni, Modern Organizations, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), p. 27.

⁵Ibid.

REFERENCE SHEET 1

Figure 1

a. The Theoretical Predictions of Behavior for Moralists, Moral-Expeditors, and Expeditors in Sixteen Types of Role Conflicts*

	Moralists				Moral-Expeditors				Expeditors			
Type	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Expectation	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B
Legitimacy	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L	L L
Sanctions	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -
Behavior	a	a	c	c	a	b	a	c	a	b	a	c
Type	5	6	7	8	5	6	7	8	5	6	7	8
Expectation	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B
Legitimacy	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I	L I
Sanctions	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -
Behavior	a	a	a	a	a	c	a	a	a	b	a	a
Type	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12	9	10	11	12
Expectation	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B
Legitimacy	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L	I L
Sanctions	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -
Behavior	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b
Type	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16
Expectation	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B	A B
Legitimacy	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I	I I
Sanctions	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -	+ +	- -
Behavior	d	d	d	d	a	b	a	d	a	b	a	d

Figure 2

Example of the effect of "value orientation" in differentiating resolution behavior in a role conflict situation.

	Moralist	Expedient	Moral-Expedient
Perceived Expectation	A B	A B	A B
Legitimacy	L I	L I	L I
Negative Sanctions	W S	W S	W S
Predicted Outcome Behavior	CONFORMITY TO A	CONFORMITY TO B	COMPROMISE

L = Legitimate

I = Illegitimate

W = Weak negative sanctions

S = Strong negative sanctions

REFERENCE SHEET 2

Numerical designations of role alternatives utilized in the study:

- Role 1 -- Chief school officer serves primarily as agent of the board, either as chief negotiator or as person with major responsibility for assertion of board's position in negotiations.
- Role 2 -- Chief school officer functions as agent of mediation with board and staff. Conducts sessions with representatives of both groups in the interest of achieving a satisfactory resolution of existing differences.
- Role 3 -- Chief school officer identified as spokesman for the professional interests of teachers.
- Role 4 -- Chief school officer acts as primary resource person for each group, providing information on request which may be utilized in clarifying and reconciling local issues.

TABLE 1

ROLE PREFERENCES ATTRIBUTED TO BOARDS AND TEACHERS,
AND PREFERENCES HELD BY CHIEF SCHOOL OFFICERS

	Frequency Reported For:			
	Role 1 Negoti- ator	Role 2 Mediator	Role 3 Teacher Consultant	Role 4 Resource Consultant
Role Preferences Attributed to boards	51	24	0	13
Role Preferences Attributed to teachers	28	36	5	19
Role Preferences Held by Chief School Officers	33	35	0	20
Frequency of Actual Role Definition Reported	45	38	0	15